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NICKLES SEEKS TO ELIMINATE WELFARE REFORM REVERSAL IN PRESCRIPTION DRUGS BILL

WASHINGTON—Senate Budget Committee Chairman Don Nickles today worked on behalf of an amendment to strike a provision in the Medicare prescription drugs bill that rolls back 1996 welfare reform law. The amendment calls on the Finance Committee to have full and open hearings on what would be a monumental change to current law.

The landmark Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 requires legal immigrants and their sponsors to take financial responsibility for themselves for five years after entering the United States. The Medicare bill would reverse that requirement by expanding taxpayer-financed health insurance under the State Children's Health Insurance Program and Medicaid to legal immigrant children and legal immigrant pregnant women.

Nickles offered an amendment to strike that expansion during markup of the bill in the Finance Committee but it was defeated. Today's effort was led by Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-AL), a Budget Committee member.

"These are individuals who come to the United States under the condition that they will not become dependent on government handouts for at least five years," Nickles pointed out.

Sponsors of legal immigrants must sign an affidavit agreeing "to support the intending immigrant and any spouse and/or children immigrating with him or her and to reimburse any government agency or private entity that provides these sponsored immigrants with Federal, State or local means-tested public benefits."

"This is a common-sense, reasonable requirement," Nickles said. "What is contemplated in this bill is a monumental change in funding, eligibility and criteria for these programs. If we are going to revisit this requirement, we ought to have a full and open debate in committee and it ought to be done in conjunction with welfare reauthorization, not on this bill."

"The \$400 billion we are working with is budgeted for strengthening Medicare and providing a prescription drugs benefit for seniors. We have limited resources for doing that and we should not be diverting these funds to other entitlement programs."